

Approved For Release 2001/03/04 : CIA-RDP80-01601R0

CONFIDENTIAL

THE ASIA LETTER

AN AUTHORITY ANALYSIS OF ASIAN AFFAIRS

Published by THE ASIA LETTER Co. Tokyo Hong Kong Washington Los Angeles

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25 May 1971

Dear Sir:

THE C.I.A. IN ASIA (I): When United States Central Intelligence Agency Director RICHARD HELMS was getting ready to visit Saigon last fall for talks with South Vietnamese President NGUYEN VAN THIEU, he sent ahead an unusual calling card.

It was in the form of a news leak to the New York Times.

A story quoting "government officials" related in considerable detail the C.I.A. finding that there were some 30,000 agents of the Vietcong that had insinuated themselves into the Saigon government apparatus.

The findings revealed Hanoi intentions to increase that number to 60,000 by the end of 1971.

The conclusion was that the Saigon government would not be able to cope with these agents in shaping the country's future.

The information had very little to do with fact.

The figures came out of a hat---Richard Helms' hat.

The story was, frankly, designed to scare the hell out of President Thieu and make Helms' bargaining position a little easier.

What Helms was selling was the C.I.A. line of a need for a tougher security stance internally. Basically, President RICHARD NIXON had asked Helms if there was something he could do about the rampant corruption inside the Thieu government---officers squandering aid funds on luxury cars, wine and women and allowing an unacceptable amount of Uncle Sam's cash to turn up as flight capital to Swiss and French banks.

It was one of the rare (but increasing) instances when Helms and the C.I.A.---generally close-mouthed adherents to the "no comment" school---had ever used the press for leverage.

But it tells a lot about the C.I.A., which often feels frustrated about "not getting its message across" to the people it wants to reach in and out of the administration.

For the last few months, for example, the C.I.A. has been peddling in Washington and elsewhere details of an intensified Communist Chinese road-building effort in northern Laos.

But correspondents involved with Peking ping-pong and other developments have found the story not glamorous enough, nor different enough, from earlier ones on the same subject to get much space.

Helms visited Laos, which has come to be known as "C.I.A. Country", after twisting Thieu's arm and then went on to Tokyo to discuss Red China's nuclear, rocket and submarine developments with officials of Japan's intelligence-defense establishment.

These events were not reported in your daily newspaper and the exact details will never be known.

The C.I.A. is a many tentacled thing.

It operates in many diverse ways.

Approved For Release 2001/03/04 : CIA-RDP80-01601R000300360129-1

WITHOUT AUTHORIZATION

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Approved For Release 2001/03/04 : CIA-RDP80-0

Number: 361

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